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Supervised by: **ABDUL MALIK MUJAHD**

P.O. Box: 22743, Riyadh 11416 R.S.A. Tel: 00966-01-4033602404/432 Fax: 4927659
E-mail: Riyadh@dar-us-salam.com, info@dar-us-salam.com, info@dar-us-salam.com

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U.A.E.

Darussalam, Sharjah U.A.E.
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Darussalam@darussalam.net.ae

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Tel: 001-713-722 0418 Fax: 001-713-722 0418
E-mail: Houston@dar-us-salam.com
www.dar-us-salam.com

CANADA

Mohammed Al-Muhammad
23415 Onda Rd Unit 8 008
Mississauga, Ontario L4T 4Z6, Canada
Tel: 001-416-4155219

FRANCE

Darussalam, Paris
118 Rue Jean Pierre Truphot 75011, Paris, France
Tel: 0033 01 48 52229 Fax: 0033 01 48 52297



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Saum - Fast

The linguistic meaning of Saūm

The word *siyām* (sing. *saūm*) is derived from *sama*, which means to restrain from eating, drinking, talking, etc. If an individual refrains from these things, he is a *sāim*. The Noble Qur'ān uses the word in the general sense when it revealed the conversation between the angel and Mary, the mother of Jesus. The angel instructed her:

فَكُلِي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا فَإِمَّا تَرِينَ مِنَ الْبَشَرِ أَحَدًا فَقُولِي إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ
لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أُكَلِّمَ الْيَوْمَ إِنْسِيًّا ﴿٣٦﴾

“So eat and drink and be glad. And if you see any human being say: Verily, I have vowed a fast unto the most Gracious (Allah) so I shall not speak to any human being this day”. (Maryam 19:26)

The phrase, “I shall not speak” is the interpretation of the Arabic word *saūm*. The reason for this interpretation is that *saūm* cannot mean fast, i.e., to restraint from food, because Mary had just been told to eat from the fruits of the palm tree. This general meaning is common to the Arabic language.

The juristic meaning of Saūm

In the terminology of the *Shari'ah*, the word *saūm* means to abstain from food, drink and sexual activity from dawn to sunset, with the intention

of doing so sincerely and solely for Allah, the Exalted. This is because fasting purifies the soul and cleanses it from the evil that might cause it to become a miser and their ill behavior.¹

The linguistic and juristic meaning of Ramadān

The word Ramadān is called as such to indicate the heating sensation (of the stomach as a result of thirst). Others have said that it is called as such because Ramadān scorches out the sins with good deeds, as the sun burns the ground; others have said that it is called as such because the hearts and souls are more readily receptive to the admonition and remembrance of Allah during Ramadān, as the sand and stones are receptive to the sun's heat. The framers of this beautiful language may have been inspired in naming this month Ramadān. Otherwise, the relation between the heat and its properties is miraculously similar to that of Ramadān. While the heat represents the matter that helps shape, form, and mold virtually every matter – from metal and plastics, to plants and living cells – Ramadān undoubtedly helps a serious believer remold, reshape, reform, and renew his physical and spiritual disposition and behavior.²

Legal status of Ramadān

According to Qur'ān it is an obligatory action. Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ
مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

“O you who believe! Observing *As-Saūm* (the fasting) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become *Al-Muttaqūn* (the pious).” (Al-Baqarah 2:183)

Shortly afterwards, Allah also says:

1. *Tafsir* Ibn Kathir: 1/496,497

2. *Essentials of Ramadān the Fasting Month*, P: 16

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ
مِّنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ

“The month of Ramadān in which was revealed the Qur'ān, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion (between right and wrong). So whoever of you is resident during the month must observe fast...” (Al-Baqarah 2:185)

The entire Muslim Nation has agreed that it is obligatory to fast during the month of Ramadān, and it being one of the pillars of Islam. It is something that is known about the religion. The one who rejects it as a practice is a disbelieving apostate who has left the fold of Islam.³

The Divine wisdom behind the decree of fasting is that it involves purification of the human soul from immoralities and vices; for fasting blocks the evil ways of Satan, as Satan circulates in the body of a person just like the circulation of blood. Whenever a person eats or drinks, his soul becomes vulnerable to his desires, his will weakens, and he becomes reluctant toward worship. This is contrary to the case of a person who is fasting. Moreover, fasting induces the renunciation of wordly pleasure and personal desires and draws a Muslim's attention to the Hereafter. Fasting also makes one sympathize with the poor and needy by gaining a sense of their sufferings from the hardships of hunger and thirst.

The reference to the earlier *Ummahs* in the verse shows the importance on the one hand, and gives an encouragement to the Muslims on the other. It indicates that although there may be inconvenience in fasting but the same inconvenience was also faced by the earlier communities. This brings a psychological comfort to the Muslims, because if an inconvenience is faced by a large number of people, it becomes easier to bear.⁴

The verse simply says that fasting has been enjoined on Muslims as it was enjoined on past communities. From this it does not necessarily follow that the fasts which was enjoined upon the earlier communities is identical in all respects with the fasts enjoined upon this *ummah*. There

3. *Fiqh As-Sunnah*: 1/366

4. *Ruhul-Ma'ani*: 1/453

may have been difference in the number and the timings of the fasts, etc. Actually there is a big difference between the fasts as later generations completely altered it.

Fasting was only for special classes of people in the previous religions. In the Hindu religion, fasting is mandatory only for the high priests in the Brahmin class. In the some Latin religions, it is only women who must fast without exception. In Judaism, the faster eats only after the break and there is no more food. The Arabs, before Islam, would not eat after sleeping.

The subject of fasting in Christianity is very difficult to discuss, simply because Christianity as a whole is very short on religious laws. Besides, there is fundamental disagreement among the scholars to whether Jesus commanded fasting. Fasting in Christianity seems to have evolved with time and is effected by social, political, and economic factors.

Jesus fasted 40 days before starting his mission. It is possible that he fasted on the Day of Atonement, which was an established tradition in Judaism. By the 4th century, there was no sign of 40 days fasting in Christianity. There are traditions which Christians live. The fast in Rome was different from the fast in Alexandria. Some abstain from meat, while others from fish and birds. Some will not eat fruits and eggs; some just fast on white bread. Some will abstain from all the above. Certain days had been made for fasting in later centuries to commemorate some events, such as the life of Jesus. There was a fast for three days in English law. During the time of Edward VI, James I and the Elizabeth, meat was prohibited during the fast, and James justified that saying: "The fishing industry and maritime commerce must become encouraged and it must be profitable."⁵

Obligation of Ramadān from the sayings of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)

Ibn Umar (رضي الله عنه) narrated, Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

5. Arkane Arba'ah by Abul Hasan Nadwi

بُيِّنَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ شَهَادَةٍ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامُ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءُ الزَّكَاةِ وَالْحَجُّ وَصَوْمُ رَمَضَانَ

Islam is based on (the following) five principles:

- 1- To testify that *La illaha illallah wa anna Muhammad-ur-Rasul Allah* (none has the right to be worshiped but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah)
- 2- *Iqamat-as-Salāt* (to perform the compulsory congregational prayers).
- 3- To pay *Zakah*
- 4- To perform Hajj (i.e. pilgrimage to Makkah)
- 5- To observe *Saūm* (fasts) during the month of Ramadān.⁶

Talhah bin 'Ubaid-Ullah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that a Bedouin with unkempt hair came to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and said, "O Allah's Messenger! Inform me what Allah has made compulsory for me as regards to the prayer." He replied: "You have to perform the five compulsory *salāt* in a day and night (24 hours), unless you want to offer *nawafil*." The Bedouin further asked, "Inform me what Allah has made compulsory for me as regard fasting." He replied, "You have to observe *Saūm* (fast) during the whole month of Ramadān, unless you want to fast more as *nawafil*." The bedouin further asked, "Tell me how much *zakah* Allah has enjoined on me." Thus, Allah's Messenger informed him about all the laws (i.e. fundamentals) of Islam. The Bedouin then said, "By Him who has honored you, I will neither perform any *nawafil* nor will I decrease what Allah has enjoined on me." Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

أَفْلَحَ إِنْ صَدَقَ أَوْ دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِنْ صَدَقَ

"If he is saying the truth he will succeed or said he will be granted paradise"⁷

'Āishah (رضي الله عنها) narrated that the Quraish used to observe fast on the day of

6. Bukhari: 8

7. Bukhari: 1891

Merits and Virtues of Saum

Forgiveness and great reward for the men and women who observe Saūm

Allah says:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَنِينَ
وَالْقَنِاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ
وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّامِينَ وَالصَّامَاتِ
وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا
وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٢٥﴾

Verily the Muslims men and women, the believers men and women, the men and the women who are obedient (to Allah), the men and women who are truthful, the men and women who are humble, the men and women who give *sadaqat* (i.e. *zakah* and alms etc) the men and women who observe *saūm*, the men and women who guard their chastity (from illegal sexual acts) and men and women who remember Allah much (with their hearts and tongues) Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward (i.e.

Paradise). (Al-Ahzab 33:35)

Ar-Raiyan is one of the gates of Paradise

Shal (ﷺ) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

إِنَّ فِي الْجَنَّةِ بَابًا يُقَالُ لَهُ الرَّيَّانُ يَدْخُلُ مِنْهُ الصَّائِمُونَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
لَا يَدْخُلُ مِنْهُ أَحَدٌ غَيْرُهُمْ

“There is a gate in Paradise called *ar-Raiyan*, and those who observe the fast will enter through it on the Day of Resurrection and none except them will enter through it. It will be said, ‘Where are those who used to observe fast?’ They will get up, and none except them will enter through it. After this entry the gate will be closed and no body will enter through it.

Abu Hurairah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) said, “Whoever gives two kinds (of things or property), in charity for Allah’s cause, will be called from the gates of Paradise and will be addressed, ‘O slaves of Allah! Here is prosperity, so, whoever was amongst the people who used to offer their prayers will be called from the gates of the *salāt*; and whoever was amongst the people who used to participate in jihad will be called from the gate of jihad; and whoever was amongst those who used to observe the fast will be called from the gate of *ar-Raiyān*; whoever was amongst those who used to give charity, will be called from the gate of *as-Sadaqah*.” Abu Bakr (رضي الله عنه) said, “Let my parents be sacrificed for you, O Allah’s Messenger! No distress or need will befall him who will be called from those gates. Will there be anyone who will be called from all these gates?” The Prophet (ﷺ) replied:

نَعَمْ وَأَرْجُو أَنْ تَكُونَ مِنْهُمْ

“Yes, and I hope you will be one of them.”¹

1. Bukhari: 1896,1897.

Prophet used to keep awake all night and perform prayer and also used to keep his family awake for the prayer.”¹³

In another narration of ‘Aishah (رضي الله عنها):

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَجْتَهِدُ فِي الْعَشْرِ الْآخِرِ مَا لَا يَجْتَهِدُ فِي غَيْرِهَا.

“The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would struggle (to perform *salāt* more) during the last ten (nights) more than he would struggle in the rest of it.”¹⁴



13. Bukhari: 2024
14. Tirmidhi: 796

Sadaqatul-Fitr

Obligation of Sadaqatul-Fitr

Ibn Umar (رضي الله عنهما) narrated:

فَرَضَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ زَكَاةَ الْفِطْرِ صَاعًا مِنْ تَمْرٍ أَوْ صَاعًا مِنْ شَعِيرٍ عَلَى الْعَبْدِ وَالْحُرِّ وَالذَّكَرِ وَالْأُنْثَى وَالصَّغِيرِ وَالْكَبِيرِ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَأَمَرَ بِهَا أَنْ تُؤَدَّى قَبْلَ خُرُوجِ النَّاسِ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ.

“Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) made obligatory the payment of one Sā’ (2.6 KG) of dates or one Sā’ of barely as zakatul-fitr on every Muslim slave or free, male or female, young or old; and he ordered that it be paid before the people went out to offer ‘Eid prayer.”¹

Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنهما) said: “The Prophet (ﷺ) made obligatory on every male or female, free man or slave, the payment of one Sā’ of dates or barely as *sadaqatul-fitr*.” The people then substituted one-half Sā’ of wheat for that. Ibn ‘Umar used to give dates. Nafi’ added: Once there was scarcity of dates in Madinah and Ibn ‘Umar gave barely (instead). And Ibn ‘Umar used to give *sadaqatul-fitr* for every young and old person. He even used to give it on behalf of his children.

Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنهما) used to give *sadaqatul-fitr* to those who had been officially appointed for its collection. People used to give *sadaqatul-fitr* to those who had been officially appointed for its collection. People used to

1. Bukhari: 1503